

## EDITORIAL: Measles is back, thanks to anti-vaxxers

The Disneyland measles contagion is at 26 patients and counting. Thanks to one infected park visitor and at least a dozen unvaccinated bystanders, a potentially lethal disease that had been all but eradicated in this country has spread throughout Northern and Southern California and into three other states.

At least six people have been hospitalized after visiting the packed Anaheim theme park during the week before Christmas. Some of the victims are babies.

More than 380 people have had to be quarantined in Utah because two kids brought it home with them and spread it around Provo and Orem, from grocery stores to churches to movie theaters. Health officials in Washington's Snohomish and Grays Harbor counties have had to retrace the movements of two unvaccinated females who flew there while they were infected and contagious. In Colorado, an adult who returned with the disease to El Paso County was the county's first case of the measles in more than two decades.

We can't say the outbreak is a surprise. For years, public health officials have warned that the anti-vaccination movement was making us and our children vulnerable to formerly conquered diseases. As recently as 2000, federal health officials had declared that the U.S. had eliminated measles, though that disease, like others, continues to be a problem in Southeast Asia, parts of Europe and elsewhere.

Then came the rise of the anti-vaxxers. Waving discredited scientific reports that falsely tie vaccines to autism, these foolish parents, many from affluent enclaves like Disneyland's Orange County, stopped immunizing their children.

Ignoring the continuing risk of infection from Third World travelers and the importance of the "herd immunity" that protects everybody, the movement undermined all those years of progress.

Since 2006, the percentage of California kindergartners vaccinated for measles has fallen from 95% to 92.6%, perilously close to the 92% threshold. Predictably, the disease has returned in epidemic proportions: Between 2013 and 2014, cases more than tripled nationally and nearly quadrupled in California. And one or two of every 1,000 infected children die from it, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Whooping cough and the mumps also are making comebacks. Surely this outbreak proves that enough is enough.

Older generations of Americans may regard the measles nostalgically as a childhood rite of passage involving a rash and fever, but infection can lead to pneumonia, encephalitis and meningitis.

State Sen. Richard Pan, D-Sacramento, believes better information is one answer. Pan pushed a state law that last year required parents to be fully informed before exercising the "personal belief" exemption from vaccination requirements for school children. It helped, leading to the first rise in kindergarten vaccination rates in years.

Pan is pushing a follow-up bill this year that would more fully inform parents of vaccination rates in their school districts. It's a good idea, but more should be done to counteract the anti-vaxxers.

Even now, their response to the outbreak is about their "right" to leave their kids unprotected, forgetting that the rest of us have rights, too. It's a small world, as they say in Disneyland, and these diseases are out there in it. We don't have to be this vulnerable.

